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ABSTRACT

Despite the myth of Asian academic success, there is a distinction between the educational background and academic achievements of immigrant and refugee children from literate, urban, western-influenced backgrounds, and refugee children from pre-literate, rural cultures that are uninfluenced by Western technology and education. This is demonstrated by examining the Hmong. Hmong children are relatively uneducated when they arrive in the United States. The longer they remain in the United States, the better they do on standardized tests. The younger the Hmong children are when they first arrive, the better their chances of achieving academically. In the classroom, their drive and determination compensate for their lack of background: of the Hmong in San Diego, California, 40 percent had grade point averages above 3.0. The following explanations of Hmong children's classroom performance are discussed: (1) the studies of Kan and Liu, which concentrate on socioeconomic analysis; and (2) wave theory, which concentrates on rural-urban differences among refugees who fled their native countries at different times. The importance of ethnicity to the Hmong is discussed. Structural and institutional issues are addressed. Implications for future research are outlined. Data are presented on four tables. A seven-page bibliography is included. (BJV)

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ASIAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS MYTH:

THE HMONG STORY

Qualifying Paper for the Doctorate in Educ
Harvard Graduate School of Education

By

Wendy D. Walker

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December 6, 1988

Author's note:

I have updated this paper since it was originally written. The gaps in the literature that I identified in this paper have been explored in my doctoral thesis, "Among the Hmong, the Challenge of Refugees in America's Schools." The focus of my doctoral thesis is on the Hmong cultural influence on learning behavior, the preparation of teachers, counselors and adminstrators for the unusual challenges of Hmong students, and innovative strategies for schools and teachers. Please contact me for copies of my thesis after June 1989.

I would be very happy to hear from any readers who have questions, insights, or other experiences with the Hmong or other immigrant or refugee groups. I also give lectures and inservice training. Please see the enclosed form. Thank you.

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I. INTRODUCTION
MYTH OF THE AMAZING ASIAN

Contrasting with the myth of the "Amazing Asians, The Secret of their Academic Success,[1]" prevailing in popular literature, the Hmong story shows that there is a primary distinction between the educational background and academic achievements of immigrant and refugee children from literate, urban, western-influenced backgrounds, and refugee children from pre-literate, rural cultures who were not exposed to western technology and education prior to the Indochina war. This distinction differentiates the Vietnamese, Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos from the Hmong and other hilltribes from Laos, and the Cambodians.

The available data tells us that the Hmong are not "the Amazing Asians" of media renown. Sonsalla (1984) found that 68 percent of the Hmong hilltribe children in the St.Paul and Minneapolis school systems, and 98 percent of their parents, had no formal schooling before coming to the United States (Sonsalla, 1984). Only 8 percent of Hmong adults come from urban backgrounds, and their median years of education is 1.6 years (Rumbaut and Weeks, 1986). At Ban Vinai, the Hmong refugee camp in Thailand, 63 percent of children aged 7-14 were in school in 1986, but by grade 6 most of the girls had dropped out (Horn, 1986). There is no formal education at Ban Vinai past grade 6.

According to one study on Southeast Asians in Oregon schools, while "the Vietnamese and Chinese refugee students did appear to correspond to the general Asian-American experience in schools, Lao, Mien (another hilltribe from Laos), and Cambodian children did not" (Blakely,1984:20). The author concluded that

"it seems plausible that the gap between the more westernized and better educated Vietnamese as a whole and the less westernized and less educated Laotians (including Hmong and other hilltribes) and Cambodians could grow wider in the next generation. As a group, Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese have had a head start on Laotian and Cambodian refugees" (Blakely,241).

Indeed, "60 Minutes" sent a preparation team to Boulder (Colorado) High School for a Mike Wallace special on their Asian students. At the end of the visit the school was informed that "60 Minutes" would not be using their school basically because the Asians at Boulder High School, primarily Hmong and Cambodian, were not academically successful (Lester, 1987). That Boulder High School graduated a mother of three who had worked while attending school, along with several other young Hmong mothers, in June, 1987 was not regarded as successful. Perhaps the success of Hmong students ought to be measured differently than by standard measures of achievement?

A recent study of Southeast Asian students in San Diego (Rumbaut and Ima, 1987), found that Fluent English Proficient (FEP) Hmong in grades 7-12 averaged the lowest score of all Indochinese groups tested in San Diego on reading comprehension. FEP Hmong averaged in the 19th national percentile in reading vocabulary, and in the 23rd on all reading tests of the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) for grades 4-11. Yet, on math skills, FEP Hmong in grades 4-11 ranked in the 66th national percentile. In comparison, however, the average Vietnamese student scored in the 80th national percentile on math

skills, and Chinese Vietnamese scored in the 76th.

My findings corroborate those of Rumbaut and Ima's (1987) that the longer Hmong students are in the United States, the better they do on language and reading achievement tests. The younger the Hmong students, the better they do on standardized math achievement tests. I found that Hmong leaders in Providence, RI and Merced, CA believe that Hmong children who begin school in the United States at an early age and are mainstreamed do well academically, but those who arrive at an older age and are placed in middle or high school, do poorly.

It is important to note that 82 percent of Hmong students in the Rumbaut and Ima study did not take the CTBS tests because they were Limited English Proficient. More Vietnamese (41 percent) and Chinese Vietnamese (24 percent) did take the CTBS tests. If the average FEP Hmong student in the San Diego study lived in Providence, Rhode Island, he or she would have been classified as an LEP by scoring below the 36th percentile on a standardized test.

The surprising finding in San Diego was that 40 percent of the Hmong students had grade point averages above 3.0. The Hmong also had the smallest percentage of students with grade point averages below 2.0 of any ethnic group in the city. Unfortunately, there are no data available on the tracking levels of the Hmong, and this is essential to a full explanation of Hmong academic performance. One explanation is that the Hmong have the drive and the determination that has characterized all immigrant groups. Rumbaut and Ima (1987:15) found that,

> the lowest GPAs across the board are those of native English -American students. For whites, Hispanics, Filipinos and Asians, the GPAs of (preponderantly) immigrant FEP students whose primary home language is not English are always higher than the GPAs of their (preponderantly) U.S. born, native-English, ethnic/racial counterparts.

The Hmong are "perfect" students. They do their homework, they come to class prepared, they have neat, precise handwriting, and they are polite and respectful to their teachers. This good behavior does not hurt their grades. The amount of time these youngsters spend on homework may pay off in good grades, but when it comes to standardized tests, they cannot compensate for lack of background.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this paper is to learn why the Hmong do less well than Vietnamese students in American schools? How does the Hmong educational background compare to that of the Asian immigrants and Vietnamese?[2] What are the priorities of the Hmong culture that influence their academic behavior and achievement?

The basic methodology is a literature review. There is not a lot of literature on the subject of the Hmong in school. Even though the Hmong are perhaps the most researched of any of the recent Southeast Asian refugee groups, the preponderance of the literature is on resettlement issues, economic adaption and the role of the mutual assistance associations that were set up by the federal government to help them get jobs (Walker,1986). The available literature on refugees in school provides insights into the differences between Asian immigrants and Asian refugees, the differences among the waves of refugees who have come at different times, and the backgrounds of the refugee groups.

There is an assumption in the literature that background characteristics help to explain the success of certain Asian groups, and, therefore, the lack of success of others like the Hmong and Cambodians. Three explanations of why the Hmong are not doing as well as Vietnamese students in school all point to the importance of backgrounds. These three explanations will constitute the framework of the paper.

FRAMEWORK

We will explore the three background explanations of why the Hmong are not doing well academically in turn: Kan and Liu (1986), the wave theory, and Hmong ethnicity. Hmong ethnicity will entail both a discussion of the cultural influences on the behavior and achievement of the Hmong in school, and of the structural, institutional issues that arise because of Hmong ethnicity. In the last section I will discuss the implications of the literature available to date, and point to gaps in the literature. My forthcoming thesis explores many of the gaps in the literature, particularly the unusual challenges of Hmong students, the preparation of educators, and a few of the innovative strategies they developed for these youngsters.

The paper entails a general understanding of the immigration patterns and a basic theory of immigration. The author fully recognizes the importance of comparisons between Southeast Asian refugees and earlier immigrants, particularly in the recent work of Perlmann (forthcoming) on Providence, Rhode Island. In the interest of keeping a narrow focus, I have selected some aspects about assimilation and the problems of earlier immigrants that

are particularly relevant to the story of recent Asian immigrants, but for the most part, the literature on assimilation and the history of earlier immigrant groups has been left for future work.

Studies that have created the Asian success story are based on grade point averages, standardized test scores, and colleges attended. They generally refer to Asian immigrants, Vietnamese, and an occasional urban Lao or Cambodian. Except for Rumbaut and Ima (1987), they do not talk about the Hmong. There have been no longitudinal studies that compare the achievement of refugee and immigrant students who entered American schools in kindergarten or the first grade with students who entered in higher grades without preparation, regardless of background. The 1980 Census, upon which most recent studies of background characteristics are based, recorded only Asian immigrant groups and the Vietnamese who had been in the United States long enough to participate. The absence of data on the Hmong and Cambodians in this primary source of data creates problems for researchers.

Inside the schools, there has been no research to date on the preparation and perspectives of teachers, counsellors, and administrators. There has been no research on the involvement of the Southeast Asian refugee communities in the schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For two years, I was in charge of the literature review for a national study of recent immigrant and refugee children in our public schools for the National Coalition of Advocates for Students (NCAS). During the summer of 1987, I was an intern in

the Urban Poverty Program of the Ford Foundation where I gathered data on the ethnic breakdowns of teachers and students in urban school districts around the United States, and focused on the lack of Southeast Asian teachers and counsellors, anywhere in the United States. Since then, I have been a consultant to the Ford Foundation on the preparation of educators for Southeast Asian students and the need for a two way street of communication between refugee communities and the schools.

Throughout this long process of discovering what literature and data were available, I maintained notes that I continually ordered and reordered. As predicted by Glaser and Strauss (1967), patterns and themes began to emerge as I became familiar with the literature. A key linkage emerged between Hmong ethnicity and the academic behavior of the Hmong.

II. IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND

No causal linkage has been established between background characteristics and the academic achievement of refugees. Yet, in much of the literature on Asian students, there is an assumed linkage between background characteristics and academic achievement. A study by Nathan Caplan, John Whitmore, Quang Bui, and Marcella Trautman (1985) drew public attention because it found that children of "boat" refugees fit the image of the successful Asian student with high academic achievement levels. However, the findings of the study found a strong relationship between student achievement and family background.

The Caplan study found "parents of children who excel in

school...are more likely to have come from urban backgrounds and to have had parents who themselves were comparatively better educated." Almost half of the parents of the children in the Caplan study read to their children, a factor that distinguishes the Vietnamese and Vietnamese Chinese from the hilltribes and rural Cambodians where the majority of women and many of the men are pre-literate in any language. The Rumbaut and Ima (1987) data shows that the stanine scores of Hmong students on standardized reading tests increased more than 100 percent when their parent had more than six years of education.

The primary problem with the Caplan study is that the sample was limited to children of recently arrived Vietnamese, ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, and a few lowland Lao. The study neglected to include Cambodian students and Hmong hilltribe students. The "boat people" from Vietnam were perhaps the most brutalized in their escape, attacked and ravaged by pirates, but they were not the poorest of refugees. Their backgrounds afforded them the ability to pay for passage, unlike the refugees who walked across Cambodia, or swam the Mekong River tied to bamboo like most Hmong.

The emerging body of literature on refugee children in American public schools points to the importance of bridging the gap in our knowledge about the backgrounds of refugee children (Hvitfeldt,1986; Prickett, 1983; Stephen,1985). From a study of Vietnamese children in southern California, Prickett (1983:47) determined that "the background of the students, their cultural heritage, family relationships, community relationships, socio-

economical status, and acculturation and assimilation problems need to be understood by school personnel to develop a program to ensure their success in school."

Greer (1972:91 from Prickett,1983) wrote about immigrant children in general:

> What the child brings with him to the public school classroom is not a pure or direct product of an historic land of origin, but the combined product of some of those patterns and the patterns established by the group in order to survive in the place assigned to it in America.

III. KAN AND LIU'S EXPLANATION OF THE HIGH ACHIEVEMENT OF ASIAN IMMIGRANTS

Kan and Liu (1986) offer one explanation as to why certain Asian groups, like Vietnamese students, have high levels of academic success. Reversing this explanation may explain why some groups, like the Hmong, do not have as high levels of academic success. Kan and Liu (1986), in an analysis of the 1980 Census Public Use Microdata Samples, concluded that the high achievement of Asian American children in schools could be explained by a combination of three variables. The first "is that most Asian children come from highly educated families with considerable resources for children to become familiar with educational tools, such as computer terminals at home." The second is "immigrant vigor," the incentive that comes from knowing successful immigrants of the same ethnic group. The third is cultural. Kan and Liu offer the example of earlier research by Caudill (1962) and DeVos (1960) on the sense of guilt for their parents' sacrifices that prompts Japanese children to study long hours. The influence of the home on student performance will be discussed

under "Hmong Ethnicity," in Part V.

DIFFERENCES IN BACKGROUNDS OF REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS

Hmong are not part of the "most Asian children (who) come from highly educated families with considerable resources for children to become familiar with educational tools, such as computer terminals at home." Most Hmong children come from homes with little or no formal education and high levels of poverty. The median years of education for Hmong adults was 1.6 years (Rumbaut and Weeks, 1986). Please see TABLE 1 in the Appendix. In comparison, the Vietnamese adult refugees who participated in the 1980 Census had 12.4 years median years of education, comparable to black Americans and white Americans.

With the exception of the Vietnamese refugees, it seems almost absurd to compare Southeast Asian refugees with Asian immigrants. The high levels of education of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean immigrants recorded in 1980 Census reflect the United States "selective immigration of well-educated Asians (Kan and Liu, 1986). At the other extreme from the Hmong, Filipinos had 14.1 median years of education. Please see TABLE 2. More Vietnamese adults had four or more years of college in 1980, than black or Hispanic Americans (TABLE 5). Over half of Asian Indians, approximately one third of Chinese, Filipino, and Korean Americans, and approximately one quarter of Japanese Americans had four or more years of college in 1980, compared to about one out of six white Americans.

WRITING ILLITERACY

Instead of recording percentages of college graduates amongst refugees, Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) recorded levels of illiteracy Please see TABLE 1. Only 1 percent of the ethnic Vietnamese were illiterate in writing, but 71 percent of the Hmong were illiterate in writing in any language. This finding is not surprising in light of the fact that Hmong is not a written language. Although French and American missionaries in Laos in the mid-1950s created a Romanized script for Hmong, it was primarily adopted only by a small minority of Hmong who had been converted to Christianity. This may change, however, as the practices of their oral tradition give way to a literate society and the Hmong recognize a growing need to preserve the stories, history, and beliefs of the Hmong in the Hmong language.

HMONG STUDENTS TODAY ARE THE GROUND-BREAKERS FOR FUTURE HMONG

Formal education is relatively new to the Hmong. The Hmong in school in the United States today are the ground-breakers for the majority. They will inform those who come after them (Goldstein,1985), but as the first to enter the systems, they have little preparation for American schools.

Living high in the chimney steep mountains of northern Laos, the majority had never seen technical or modern devices until the Indochina war. "Being situated in the mountains in remote, isolated villages ... few, if any, Hmong had any schooling," wrote Xeu Vang Vangyi (1980). The home was the basis of informal education for Hmong children, and everyone took part in teaching a child the practical and culturally correct ways of existence

(Barney, 1957). The Hmong tradition is not literate, it is oral. The history of the Hmong is passed from father to son at Hmong New Year. Young Hmong sing songs and recite poetry about the Hmong myths and beliefs while tossing balls back and forth in their courting ritual that also occurs at Hmong New Year. Women embroider their tales of history entwined with their animistic beliefs on large pieces of cloth called "Pun Dao".

HMONG SCHOOLING

The Hmong say that education came with the war (Yang See). Around 1961, when the United States military began recruiting Hmong as fighters, the Agency for International Development (AID) contracted the University of Hawaii to build primary schools and train teachers for the Hmong (Yang See, 1981). The language of instruction was Lao. Many of the schools were in the areas where Hmong were relocated so that the United States forces could bomb their villages to prevent communist takeovers (Mottin,1980). AID and the Lao Ministry of Education established two high schools for Hmong in Sam Thong and Ban Nam Mo. AID also provided for a six month teacher training program for Hmong who had graduated from primary school (Yang See, 1981). After completion of the course, the teachers returned to the new schools in remote villages. Only a few, rich Hmong attended the French high schools or attended the Ecole Superiere de Pedagogie in Vientienne, the capital.

EDUCATION RESERVED FOR BOYS

Education of the Hmong in Laos, like the positions of leadership, was reserved for men. Hmong girls were allowed to

attend school in Laos, but few did. At the Hmong refugee camp in Thailand, Ban Vinai, the majority of the 6,000 primary school students in 1983 were boys, with approximately 100 girls. By 1986, the gender ratio improved dramatically for the youngest children. There were approximately 8,000 primary students at Ban Vinai, and 63 percent of the children aged 7-14 were in school. By grade 6, however, only 11 percent of the children were girls because most girls had dropped out (Horn,1986). Few older girls take the correspondence courses and private courses offered around the camp.

EDUCATION IN THE CAMPS

After ten years, literature on the quality of education programs in the refugee camps of Southeast Asia remains limited. We know that the quality of educational programs depends upon the refugee teachers. According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, "the quality of such programs is erratic at best...You may very well find many of your elder students, ages 10-15, who are illiterate or nearly illiterate in their own language (Center for Applied Linguistics,1981).

Schools are run and funded under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees by voluntary agencies that change periodically, or by the Thai Ministry of Education that may work with a voluntary agency, or by the refugees themselves. Textbooks and notebooks are non-existent or minimal while classroom space is sparse and limited. The curriculum is expected to include reading and writing in one's national language, and mathematics. Education in the camps is limited to the sixth grade

because the Thai government does not want the refugees to be more educated than the Thai villagers.

PREPARATION FOR AMERICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Since 1985, all teenage Hmong who have come to the United States probably participated in the twenty-week program called Preparation for American Secondary Schools (PASS) at the processing centers in Phanat Nikom, Thailand or Bataan, the Philippines. This program provides a general introduction to the framework of American secondary schools, including schedules, lockers, gym, and cafeteria eating. The course work provides survival English for a high school environment and an introduction to basic math skills. According to PASS graduates, the program helped them understand the way things are done in the United States, such as getting to school by bus or other transport, to get food in the cafeteria, to follow school rules, to look for numbers to find their classes, and to keep a notebook.

NATIVE LANGUAGE LITERACY

Many Hmong adults participate in the Native Language Literacy Program in the Phanat Nikom camp before coming to the United States. The theory behind the effort to help middle-age people become literate in their own language before they go to the United States is that students who understand what a language is will have an easier time learning a second language. Without being able to read and write in their own language, they only have their memory to help them learn English. Native speakers train refugees as teachers in Hmong, Cambodian, Lao, and other hilltribe

languages. 98 percent of the students are women.

WHAT ARE THE CULTURAL MODELS TO INSPIRE "IMMIGRANT VIGOR?"

Kan and Liu found that the successes of fellow immigrants inspired "immigrant vigor." Hmong students appear to have a tremendous amount of immigrant vigor, but not because of successful role models. Contrary to stereotypes of traditional minority students, Hmong students are highly motivated despite extreme poverty, uneducated parents, and having few Hmong rolemodels who have achieved financial or academic success. It seems that, for the Hmong, "immigrant vigor" reflects the cultural pride and determination to prove themselves equal to Americans that characterised their war efforts.

The very existence of successful role models amongst recent immigrants and refugees suggests that certain class advantages are carried from the country of origin. As with earlier immigrants at the turn of the century (Perlmann forthcoming), "the class position of an ethnic group in the American social structure was itself a result of the premigration characteristics of the group, and of the extent of discrimination against it, as well as of employment opportunities in the particular economy."

In terms of role models, approximately 31 percent of the Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese, and lowland Lao listed their former occupation in Asia as students (Caplan, et al,1985). The Vietnamese had higher status occupations in their countries of origin than the lowland Lao or Chinese Vietnamese, including 11 percent professionals - doctors, architects, professors, and judges, and 4 percent military officers (Caplan, et al,1985). The

lowland Lao had fewer professionals and fewer officers. Characteristic of the Chinese throughout Southeast Asia, the Sino-Vietnamese had fewer professionals and very few officers compared to the Vietnamese, but more managers than any other refugee group.

Given that until recently education was a novelty for the majority of Hmong, the role models of the Hmong are much different than those of Asian immigrants. There are no educated Hmong women to act as role models in the camps. The role models for teenage Hmong women are married and producing families. Hmong girls who continue to study past puberty are exceptional. The mother of one young woman student supports her by saying that she never had the chance to study and that she does not want her daughter to be ignorant. Another girl is an orphan and, therefore, is not subject to the same family pressure and expectations as her peers (Moffat and Walker, 1986).

Until recently, the role models for young Hmong men were inspired by the dream of bringing their new knowledge back to Laos. The dream was kept alive by General Vang Pao, and by the reconnaissance army that operated out of Ban Vinai (Moffat and Walker, 1985). Hmong were not the only refugee youth inspired to study by the hope of returning to their country of origin. In <u>The Political Life of Children</u>, Robert Coles (1986) found that a Cambodian boy in the Boston area was inspired to study because he wanted to become a pilot, and to use his skills to help restore Cambodia. Earlier immigrants felt the same desire to return to their country of origin (Haugen,1969; Perlmann,forthcoming). Many did. But returning and coming back again to the United States is

easier for immigrants than for refugees who are exiled from their country because of politics.

Today, the hope or retaking Laos is dying, but education continues to be regarded by Hmong as their "handle on the future." According to Jonas Vangay, a teacher of Hmong Culture in Merced, CA, the role models for young Hmong men began changing from farmers to soldiers during the war, and from soldiers to scholars when some Hmong returned to their families from schools in Vientiane and France. As the Hmong came down to the lowlands from the mountains, they began to realize that that they had been involved in a war of technology between superpowers that they did not understand.

POVERTY IMPACT

Hmong families are less likely than Asian immigrant groups to have "considerable resources for children to become familiar with educational tools, such as computer terminals at home" because they have had less education and they are poorer than Asian immigrants and other refugee groups. The Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) study found that 94 percent of the Hmong lived below the poverty level in San Diego. The majority of Cambodians, lowland Lao, and Chinese Vietnamese also lived below the poverty level. Fewer Vietnamese were below the poverty level than any other refugee groups. Please see TABLE 1. By comparison, less than one-sixth of the Asian immigrant populations live below poverty. Please see TABLE 2.

Kan and Liu argue that there is a "waiting period" from the date of immigration until the immigrants rise above the poverty

level. TABLE 3 shows that in almost every Asian immigrant group, the percentage of families with school-age children below poverty level declines the longer they are in the United States. [3] The "waiting period" may not apply to the Asian refugees who do not have the educational backgrounds to move into higher occupational positions as they learn more English. The wave theory may better explain that people from different socio-economic class backgrounds fled at different times.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Kan and Liu (1986) present one explanation for the high achievement of Asian immigrants and the Vietnamese. When reversed, the Kan and Liu explanation suggests that the Hmong are doing less well than their Vietnamese counterparts in school because their family backgrounds do not provide academic or cultural support. A closer analysis of the Rumbaut and Ima (1987) study reveals that it is in reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, and spelling that the Hmong have particular problems. A Vietnamese engineer professor at Sacramento State University of California said that the Hmong are diligent students who always prepare for classes and write neatly, but they have problems with conceptualization. This suggests that the oral tradition, the absence of reading or many writing materials in the home, or parents with advanced levels of education, influence the Hmong learning style and academic performance.

The 1980 Census, recent studies, and a review of the Hmong schooling give evidence of the disadvantages of the Hmong in educational background compared to Asian immigrants. The role

models of the Hmong are not the professionals that inspire the Asian immigrant youth of Kan and Liu's explanation. They are military or domestic. Given the limitations of the Hmong education, there is little reason to expect that the Hmong will move into a higher professional class after a "waiting period."

IV. THE WAVE THEORY

There is common agreement in the literature on Southeast Asian refugees that different waves of refugees fled their countries at different times. The wave concept predicts that high level officials in the government and military, and the urban, educated elite migrate first because they have the most to lose in power and possessions. They also have the most clout, and when it comes to the resettlement of refugees, they are the easiest to resettle.[4] The second wave consists of lower level government officials, military, moderately educated merchants, and family reunifications. These people have perhaps lived on the margins of power and privilege, and fear losing what they have worked hard to attain. These people may optimize their position by comparing their current deteriorating position with the prospects of a better, albeit unknown, future in a richer country. The wave theory suggests that the majority of Hmong came to the United States in the third wave and had none of the advantages of earlier waves of refugees in terms of educational background and exposure to western cultures.

The evacuation of the United States troops from Saigon in April, 1975, marked the beginning of the first wave of Southeast

Asian refugees (Gordon, 1987, Caplan, et al.,1985). In 1975, the United States accepted 130,400 refugees from Southeast Asia, more than 95 percent of whom were Vietnamese and most of the rest were Cambodian (Gordon,1987:155). Special paroles and programs allowed approximately 5,000 Hmong hilltribes, 6,000 lowland Lao, 1,600 Cambodians, and another 5,000 Vietnamese in 1976 and 1977 (Olney, 1986;Gordon,1986).

THE SECOND WAVE TO THE UNITED STATES

The second wave began in September, 1978, approximately, and brought the rest of the urban elites, the mid-level government and military officials, the merchant class, and the students. Although many of those accepted in the second wave had been waiting at the Thai border or in Thailand since 1975-1976, they were not eligible for resettlement until the 1980 Refugee Act relaxed the requirements for resettlement. No longer did a refugee have to have a connection with the United States to be considered for resettlement. At the same time, large numbers of lowland Lao and Hmong and Mien from the hills of Laos began to be resettled.

THE THIRD WAVE OF HMONG AND CAMBODIANS

Although their arrival in the United States may have overlapped with the second wave, children of rural, less educated refugees have very different influences on their schooling and fewer resources at home than children of urban, well-educated professionals. Many of the Cambodians, and most of the Hmong appear to constitute a third wave. Xeu Vang Vangyi (1980),

himself a Hmong refugee, said the third wave of Hmong refugees brought "the soldiers, the peasants, the farmers, and other working groups who had no formal education, no language training, no experiences with Western societies" (Vangyi,1980).

Between 1982 and 1986, the resettlement of Hmong refugees slowed to a trickle. Entire busses returned empty from Ban Vinai, the Hmong camp at the Laos border. According to the Hmong, Vang Pao had asked them to wait five years while he tried to get support for the Hmong army to reenter Laos. That five year period ended in 1986. Large numbers of Hmong have sought resettlement since mid-1986.

THE THIRD WAVE AND THE RURAL-URBAN DISTINCTION

The third wave is useful analytically because it distinguishes those with urban backgrounds from those with rural backgrounds. The third wave of people includes the farmers and least educated people, those with little or no experience with western technological society. The importance of rural as opposed to urban background in academic success has not been well explored. Recent literature suggests that rural origin influences a host of academic achievement variables.

Niyekawa (1986) argues that children from non-industrialized societies begin school in the United States with "dual handicaps" because they have not been as exposed to written texts as Americans. Hmong, Mien, Kmhmu, Montagnards, other Southeast Asian hilltribes, and children from the Pacific islands come from oral traditions. They have had almost no exposure to written materials, and rarely, if ever, have had someone read to them.

These children may lag behind other students in the realization that print is meaningful, the realization that written languages differ from spoken languages, and the ability to decontextualize language (McLaughlin,1985).

The extent that these "metalinguistic insights" (McLaughlin, 1985) are tied to formal schooling or to the urban environment is debated in the literature on cultural psychology. Scribner and Cole (1981) found that "urban experience" was a major influence on the perceptual restructuring skills of the Vai people in Liberia, but that schooling had no effect on these particular skills.

Writing about Polish peasants immigrants at the turn of the century, Thomas and Znaniecki (1984:217-218) discussed the alienation of the individual who learns to read in a non-reading community. Thomas and Znaniecki determined that "the development of intellectual interests is closely connected with breakdown of the isolation of the peasant community and the consequent disorganization of the old system " (Ibid). Gee (1986) argued that as children from pre-literate societies become literate, their identity with their group and of themselves will change because the ways a people converse "are tied to the particular world views (beliefs and values)." These distinctions suggest that as the Hmong become more educated, they will become more independent from the group, and, therefore, less Hmong.

DIFFERENCES IN BACKGROUND OF THE WAVES

Caplan, Whitmore, and Bui (1985) distinguished two waves. Caplan,et al (1985) found that the second wave of arrivals from Vietnam and Laos, "were significantly different in background

characteristics by comparison with their earlier cohorts. While the earlier arrivals were largely Vietnamese who were educated, familiar with western culture, and possessed English language skills, those arriving in the fall of 1978 and after were ... on average ... somewhat less educated and more limited in job skills, education, and English proficiency."

Rumbaut and Weeks (1986:429) found that by including the Hmong and Cambodians in a study that also distinguished only two waves, their sample included many who "came from rural areas of Southeast Asia and most of whom have endured prolonged stays in refugees camps overseas prior to their settlement in the United States." Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) found that only 8 percent of the Hmong, and less than half of the Cambodians, came from urban origins in the first two waves. In sharp contrast, almost all of the Chinese-Vietnamese, the Vietnamese, and the lowland Lao in the first and second waves came from urban origins. Please see TABLE 1. Caplan, et al (1985) also found that most of the Vietnamese, Chinese Vietnamese, and lowland Lao in the second wave of refugees were from urban areas.

REFUGEES LEVELS OF EDUCATION

The data suggests educational levels are tied to urban origins. TABLE 1 shows that the adult median years of education of the first wave, pre-1978, was 9.5 years, and the second wave was 6.3 years. The average of the second wave was pulled down by the Hmong (Rumbaut and Weeks, 1986).

Evidence that Vietnamese and other refugees from urban, educated backgrounds have a "head start" over rural refugee groups

is that significantly more ($p<.01$) refugees from urban backgrounds arrived in the United States with the ability to speak English than refugees from rural areas (Caplan, et al (1985). This difference remained over time. After living in the United States for some years, refugees from rural origins still had significantly less English than urban refugees (Caplan, et al,1985). Please see FIGURE 1.

Rumbaut and Weeks finding that a relatively low percentage of Hmong cannot speak any English, compared to the Cambodians, Chinese Vietnamese, and lowland Lao, despite lower levels of education and rural origins, contradicts the Caplan findings. This suggests that the Hmong pack a lot into a little formal education. It also suggests that writing literacy is not necessary to learn a spoken language. The Hmong seem to have advantages for language learning from their background as a language minority group and the oral tradition that trains the auditory system and does not rely on vision. Please see TABLE 1.

The inability of Asian mothers to speak English does not seem to affect ~~an~~ Asian children's academic achievement. Please see Table 2. Half of the more highly educated Korean and Chinese women could not speak any English. One-third of the Filipinas could not speak any English, even though that ethnic group has the highest median level of education of these groups. This further implies that the ability to speak English does not reflect the level of education. It seems that the ability to speak English is not as important as an educated family background or role models in explaining a student's academic performance.

Even though it was not statistically significant, it is interesting to note that Caplan, et al (1985) found that "children who were read to in their native language had somewhat higher GPAS than those read to in English." This suggests that parents are better off reading to their children in the language they know best.

DIFFERENCES IN POVERTY LEVELS OF WAVES

The large difference in the poverty levels between the first and second waves of refugees, TABLE 1, suggests that length of time in the United States may partially explain those who live below poverty level. Only one third of the first wave of refugees who had been in the United States for at least 5 years at the time of the Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) study were living below the poverty level. 80 percent of the second wave who had been here less time were living below the poverty level. However, the data is confounding because those who have been here longest tend to be those best prepared for western occupations, the urban and the best educated of the refugee groups, especially the Vietnamese. Those in the second wave represented a different class of immigrants, and people who were forced into total dependency by the war and life in the refugee camps.

THE FOURTH WAVE

I would posit that the Hmong arriving in 1986, and since constitute a fourth wave. The fourth wave brings the loyalists, the die-hards, those who were unwilling to give up hope to return to their previous status until all alternatives had failed. They

have seen the most of war and spent the longest time in refugee camps. The fourth wave may be similar to the second wave, in that the adults may have had relatively privileged positions in their past, like village chiefs or second tier military officers, but the education and exposure to technology of the younger generation will reflect the opportunities available in the camps where many were born or grew up. More of the children have attended primary school than in previous waves. They have been internationalized by the camp experience (Moffat and Walker, 1987).

How the fourth wave immigrants enter the United States and the "preparedness" of the fourth wave refugees will also reflect the tension between the improvement of educational programs for refugees and the winding-down of funding for such programs. Because of the politicized nature of the parents' commitment, and their extensive experience with war and deprivation, the children of the fourth wave may be more politicized than earlier waves. [5]

THE TOTAL IMPACT

As of December 31, 1986, approximately 510,400 Vietnamese refugees had been resettled in the United States, 101,900 lowland Lao, and 60,400 hilltribes from Laos, predominantly Hmong (Gordon,1987). Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) estimate that its high birthrate has increased the Southeast Asian population approximately 25 percent since their arrival, bringing the total to approximately 1.2 million Southeast Asian refugees. The quota for Southeast Asian refugees in federal fiscal year 1987 was 40,500. Plans for federal fiscal year 1989 are under way.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The wave theory tells us that the third wave is more rural than earlier waves. There is an implied linkage between rural origins and low levels of education, and another linkage between rural origins and high levels of poverty. The rural origins, oral tradition, and poverty of the third wave put most Hmong in a different class than the well-educated, urban, westernized Asian immigrants and Vietnamese.

The research suggests that the ability to speak English is not as important as an educated family background or role models in explaining a student's academic performance. Except in ESL and drama classes, students are generally judged on what they produce in writing, not by speaking. It also suggests that Hmong learn languages much as children learn their first language, by listening without knowing how to write down what they have learned. Their oral tradition and history as a language minority group seem to give the Hmong advantages for learning to speak another language by training their auditory memories. It seems logical that if the learning of the Hmong relies on hearing and listening, teachers ought to link these auditory strengths to learning how to read and write.

V. ETHNICITY

The third set of literature looks past the numbers that distinguish the Hmong from the Vietnamese and Asian immigrants in educational background. This literature considers the priorities of the Hmong culture that influence their academic achievement.[6]

To answer this, the literature addresses the basic questions of who are the Hmong? What brought them to the United States? What baggage does the Hmong child bring into the classroom? And then it asks, to what extent does the home influence educational behavior?

TWO THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

Two primary themes emerge from the available ethnographic literature on the Hmong that are relevant to why Hmong are doing so poorly in school: Hmong ethnicity, and institutional, structural issues. Goldstein (1985:286) concluded from her case study of Hmong in Minnesota, "that structural and cultural issues must be considered simultaneously to understand the processes of ethnicity for an immigrant minority." The literature provides two paths to begin to understand Hmong ethnicity. One is a cultural description of the Hmong, the other is the tale of their centuries old battle to maintain their group identity as Hmong and not be absorbed into dominant cultures.

There is a tendency in the literature, particularly that coming from United States based studies of Hmong refugee resettlement, to be definitive about the Hmong culture. However, the literature on the Hmong in Thailand, Laos, and China suggests that flexibility is an important aspect of Hmong culture. Flexibility, in fact, may be the secret to their survival as Hmong. Writing about the Hmong who settled in northern Thailand many decades ago, Geddes, (1976:72), determined that, "Relationships are constantly being varied according to contemporary circumstances. In the migratory way of life the

younger generations are the pioneers and therefore the new relationships they make become the focal points of new alignments, convenience in the present being of greater importance in many cases than association in the past."

WHO ARE THE HMONG? CLAN IDENTITY

The Hmong are a patriarchal people whose "agnatic descent based social system implies certain obligations to their fathers, elder brothers, and leaders" (Dunnigan,1982). The authority system is hierarchical and based on the family "clan." Everyone with the same last name, born or through marriage, is assumed to be a member of the same clan. The clan members refer to one another as "cousins" or "brothers." Important alliances between clans are formed through marriage (Thao,1986). It is an incest taboo to marry within one's clan.

Thao (1986) points out that the clan name is more than a surname, it is an identity and a safeguard for survival. A fellow clan member can expect shelter and assistance from any other member of the clan, even if they have never known of one another before. The sense of security provided by the clan structure, "founded on a millennium of solidarity, has been able through the centuries to help the Hmong people avoid juvenile delinquency, begging, and other social evils" (Yang Dao, 1985:4). An early Hmong settler in the United States claims that the Hmong are "likely not to believe in anyone except their clan leaders. When they decide to do something, only their clan leaders can convince or stop them from doing it" (Vangyi, 1980:12).

WHAT ARE THE HMONG CULTURAL PRIORITIES? SURVIVAL

The survival of the Hmong is the key to Hmong ethnicity and a repeating pattern in the literature and in their history. In China, according to the oldest known Chinese records, and in Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Hmong have been at odds with the existing powers. They have fought the Chinese, the ethnic Lao, the French, the Vietnamese, and the Thais to defend their interests and to remain Hmong, distinct from other ethnic groups.

The knowledge that others have threatened their survival throughout their history is passed down via their oral tradition, from father to son, every Hmong New Year (Vang Ger,unpublished). In their own lifetimes, many Hmong are aware that the threat to Hmong survival was intensified during the 1960s and 1970s when the Hmong lost a majority of their men in the war against communism that was financed by the United States.

In the last years seven years of fighting under the aegis of the United States, 1967-1975, 70 percent of the new recruits were 10 - 16 years of age (Mottin,1978:52). In 1968, Edgar Buell, known as "Pop Buell," a one man operative for the Special Forces in Laos who provided provisions from the Agency for International Development to the Hmong, reported to The New Yorker,

> a short time ago we rounded up 300 fresh recruits. 30% were 14 years old or less, and 10 of them were only 10 years old. Another 30% were 15 or 16. The remaining 40% were 45 or older. Where are the ones in between? I'll tell you - they're all dead (McCoy,1972:281).

By March 4,1970, Buell reported to the Washington Post that the

number of Hmong in Laos had dropped by about 100,000 because of war, hunger, massacres, and disease. A report to the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees in September, 1970, estimated that fifty percent of the 400,000 Hmong population were killed by the war. Many innocent farmers, ethnic Lao, Hmong, and other hilltribes were killed by the bombs dropped by B-52s on their villages (Branfmann,1972;Haney,1970).

The United States had been bombing the Ho Chi Minh trail along the Laos - Vietnam border since 1965. One of the first acts of the new Nixon administration in January, 1969, was to order a sharp increase in the number of B-52s over southern Laos to wipe out Hanoi's north-south supply line. B-52s were diverted to Laos due to the bombing halt declared in Vietnam in November, 1968. The number of bombing missions over Laos increased from 3,377 in 1968 to 5,567 in 1969 (Hersh,1983:55fn). Approximately 230,000 tons were dropped in northern Laos in 1968 and 1969 (Branfmann, 1972:4fn from the Cornell Air War study, 1971). An estimated 90 percent of the villagers in the north were affected by the bombing (Rickenbach,1970).

By 1969, approximately 800,000 Hmong, ethnic Lao, and other hilltribes had been forcibly relocated in the south. The Hmong and other hilltribes were forced to leave their disease free mountain villages and move into malaria ridden areas. As the bombing intensified, these mountain people hid in the jungles where they existed on banana leaves, roots, and tree bark. Most of the babies died, as did many of the elders. Unfamiliar with large bodies of water, and having drugged their babies with opium

to prevent them from crying, the Hmong lost more babies in the Mekong River as they escaped to Thailand, 1975 and since. Consequently, there is tremendous cultural pressure on Hmong women to reproduce as often as is humanly possible.

SURVIVAL AND HMONG STUDENTS

Most of the Hmong students in American schools do not remember the war. Many of them were born, and most grew up, in refugee camps in Thailand. Until they came to the United States, many of the refugee children had never known life outside of the camps. Indeed these children are a product of "camp culture," a term that "refers to that particular blend of influences - both modern and old work, local and global - that plays such a dominant role in the children's lives in refugee camps" (Moffat and Walker, 1986).

ETHNICITY IN UNITED STATES SCHOOLS

Sonsalla (1984), in his thesis research on Hmong high school students in St.Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, found that because of their ethnicity Hmong students have different priorities than their American teachers. Sonsalla concluded that the highest priority of Hmong students was to preserve their culture. This clashed with the highest priority of American teachers to assimilate the Hmong as fast as possible. Indeed, the fear of losing the Hmong culture is a primary reason why the fourth wave of 46,000 Hmong remained at Ban Vinai refugee camp in northern Thailand, many since 1975, despite opportunities to resettle since 1980 (Moffat & Walker,1986). The head medicine

man at Ban Vinai camp said that his grandfather, also a medicine man, told him that if the Hmong go to the United States there will be no more Hmong in fifty years.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE HOME INFLUENCE ACADEMIC BEHAVIOR?

There is no such thing as adolescence for most rural Southeast Asian youth. Goldstein (1985:106) found that:

> By Hmong standards, teens are adults with full adult responsibilities to family and community. Although senior adults support school attendance for their teenagers, they simultaneously expect them to assume communal, adult responsibilities. The definition of these responsibilities derives from the senior adults' understanding of what it means to be Hmong and what conditions they believe are necessary to maintain the type of Hmong community

that will ensure the survival of the Hmong. Goldstein also found that because they speak some English, young adults have increased responsibilities for the family, like making all telephone calls to the welfare office, landlord, or doctor. The Hmong teenager, like other Southeast Asian young adults, is expected to contribute to the family finances.

GENDER DIVISION OF LABOR

While Hmong ethnicity strongly Hmong males to attend as much schooling as possible (Goldstein, 1985) so they will have more knowledge to bring back to Laos, Hmong ethnicity seems to work against Hmong girls remaining in school once they have reached puberty. Goldstein argued that the Hmong give priority to the domestic chores of girls over education, and that there is cultural support for a girl to leave school in order to fulfill her duties in the home. The responsibilities of Hmong teenage

girls that causes them to drop-out of school include: "care of younger siblings and of the elderly, food preparation, clothes care (hand washing), and cleaning. Additional periodic duties include preparations for special occasions and feasts, and care of the sick and these people's usual chores. During the growing season, women are responsible for most of the daily gardening chores" (Goldstein, 1985:112). For married women, often as young as 13 - 15 years old, add the responsibilities of marriage, a husband, the husband's family and friends, a home, and children.

DROP OUTS

Strouse (1985:125) in her survey of Hmong adults in Dane County, Wisconsin, found that many of the women dropped out of school "claimed to have dropped out because they were pregnant or had child care responsibilities." Many schools are not equipped to provide family planning to elementary and middle school students. In Oregon, Cohn (1986:198) found that "in many of the schools Hmong attend, sex education or birth control information is not taught until the junior or senior year of high school, by which time many Hmong girls have already dropped out, married, and given birth to one or two children."

In her thesis research on two high schools in Minnesota, Goldstein (1985), found that the ratio of Hmong high school students in both schools was approximately one female to three males. According to Goldstein,(1985:67) "few girls aged 16-21 chose to attend school," and "only the few girls who were not already married enrolled in the high school." The rest, all of

whom were married, "chose to attend the technical college." Goldstein offered no evidence that the academic decisions of Hmong girls were, in fact, "choices." Once married, the husband makes decisions for the wife, including whether or not she will attend school. Goldstein also does not describe the differences between technical college and high school. Does the technical college provide day care? Are the hours more flexible for a wife and mother? Again, the decision to enroll in technical college may well be the husband's choice in many cases.

MARRIAGE

Hmong ethnicity pressures girls to marry young because Hmong males do not become full adults unless they are married (Goldstein,1985). Unless they are full adults, Hmong males cannot assume their roles in the hierarchy of Hmong leadership. Young girls are preferred because of the number of children they can bear if they begin young. Hmong girls have the youngest average age of marriage of all Southeast Asian refugees, generally age 13-18 (Kunstadter, 1983; 1984; Vang,1983 from Rumbaut and Weeks,1986). Hmong men are usually older at marriage, age 18-25.

Meredith and Rowe (1986:128) found in their survey of all Hmong in Omaha, Nebraska that 83 percent agreed that "a good wife should do what her husband tells her to do." A bride becomes part of the husband's clan, losing her original clan identity. The wife is expected to stay close to the home, and care for husband, children, and house.

Sexual exploration is practiced by both genders before marriage, but if the girl becomes pregnant, the couple is expected

to marry immediately. Polygamy and other Hmong marriage customs have changed dramatically in recent years (Kao Vang,1985; Meredith and Rowe, 1986; Thao,1986). Polygamy is still practiced by some Hmong in the camps, usually the chiefs. By traditional levirate (Dunnigan,1982), a widow automatically becomes the wife, and thus, the responsibility, of her husband's brother. This tradition changed in the Ban Vinai camp largely because women were the primary income earners with their export quilt industry. The widows' cooperative is made up of women who refused to marry their husbands' brothers.

FERTILITY

Hmong marriage should not be separated from child bearing. The Hmong believe that the reason why man and woman were created was to produce offspring, and "a good Hmong wife is a woman who gives birth to many sons and knows how to work hard and grow a lot of food" (Goldstein,1985:77). To be Hmong is to have children, and to have children is to reconstitute the Hmong so that they can retake Laos from the Vietnamese or, at the very least, protect themselves.

In the camps, Hmong females are expected to have as many children as soon as possible to replace the vast number of children who died during the years of living in the jungles and in the escape across the Mekong river. There is also an explicit desire to increase the size of the Hmong army. A newborn is introduced in the camps as a "soldier" or a "nurse." Consequently, although family planning methods are available in the camp, they are rarely practiced.

The high fertility of the Hmong is consistent, from China to Laos, to Thailand and the refugee camps, to the United States. The birth rate of the Hmong in the United States is consistent with the Hmong birthrate. According to Kunstadter (1984:24), the Hmong who settled in villages of northern Thailand many years ago are "at the upper limits of human reproductive capacity." The crude birth rate for Hmong in these Thai villages was 49 to 76 births per 1,000 women of child bearing age (Geddes,1976; Kunstadter, 1983; 1984).

Unlike other Southeast Asian refugees, the extremely high level of Hmong fertility in the United States is closely correlated with their ethnicity. So strong was being Hmong a predictor of high fertility amongst Southeast Asian refugees that Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) concluded that it seems that the usual downward influences on fertility, like education, exposure to the modern world of the United States, and work, will not affect the Hmong, at least in the foreseeable future. The correlation between ethnicity and fertility was either negative or non-existent for the lowland Lao, the Cambodians, the Vietnamese, and the Chinese Vietnamese.

According to the Rumbaut and Weeks (1986:446) study of fertility amongst Indochinese refugees in the United States:

> The current pace of childbearing among the Hmong, especially, is almost unbelievably high, and were it to continue would equal the level of the Hutterites - acknowledged to be the world's most fertile group.

Rumbaut and Weeks found that the Child-Woman ratio for every 1,000 Hmong women age 15-44, they had 1,769 children less than four years old. In comparison, for every 1,000 American women,

aged 15-44, they had 309 children less than four years old. Every 1,000 Chinese Vietnamese women in the United States had 511 children less than four years old. Lowland Lao women had 553 young children. Ethnic Vietnamese women had 574. Cambodian women had 816.

TABLE 4 shows that the median age of Hmong in the United States is 12.7 years, compared to 18 years for all Southeast Asian refugees and 31 for all Americans, and that more Hmong are less than 20 years old than any other refugee group. Yet, age - standardized rates explained only a negligible proportion of the difference in fertility (Rumbaut and Weeks,1986). My data would explain that Hmong women continue to have children throughout their reproductive years, so that the average age of a mother giving birth tells us little.

The number of children ever born to women age 45-49 confirmed for Rumbaut and Weeks that the Hmong have the highest fertility level of all groups of Southeast Asian refugees. For Hmong, the cumulative fertility average was 8.63 compared to 5.5. for Cambodians, 5.29 for Chinese Vietnamese, 5.25 for lowland Lao, and 4.63 for Vietnamese women. TABLE 4 shows that the Total Fertility Rate (unadjusted because of the sized of the sample) was 11.9 for Hmong, 7.4 for Cambodian,. 6.55 for ethnic Lao, 4.65 for Chinese Vietnamese, and 3.4 for Vietnamese in comparison to 2.4 for blacks and 1.7 for whites in the United States.

A study conducted in Oregon in 1981 (Hopkins and Clark, 1983), found that 35 percent of the Hmong women giving birth in 1981 already had borne four or more children. 1986 data from the

California Department of Health suggests that the majority of Hmong girls less than 20 years of age who gave birth in Fresno and Merced already have at least one other child. The California Department of Health analyzes birth certificates by self-identified ethnic groups. For Asians, the choices are: Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, other Asian, other, or not stated. I assumed that most of the "other Asians" in Fresno and Merced were Hmong because there are few Asian groups in these two cities other than Hmong or the groups listed above.

VI. THE STRUCTURAL/INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

The Amazing Asian myth, the wave theory, the history of the Hmong, and the literature available on Hmong ethnicity in the schools, all lead us to recognize the importance of the structural/institutional issues; how and what the schools are doing to meet the special needs of with Hmong youngsters. While there is little or nothing that educators can or should do about the influence of ethnicity on Hmong students, there is room for maneuver inside the school structure.

HMONG STUDENTS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Hmong students enter American schools with different levels of skills. According to Mary Cohn (1986), Hmong students entering American schools can be classified in three groups:

1. Those who enter the school with English skills and assimilate quickly.

2. Those with no English skills even though many were born in the United States. They've had no previous contact

with non-Hmong.

3. Hmong children and adolescents, age 13-21, with no previous education who are typically placed in grades by age rather than skills.

My own research found that Hmong leaders distinguish Hmong students differently. There are:

1. Children who were born in the United States or began school here before the fourth grade and were placed in mainstream classes. Many attended Head Start. They do well academically.

2. The young children who were placed in simplified English classes, or classes with predominantly non-English speakers, for long periods of time, regardless of where they were born. They do not perform as well as the first group academically.

3. Older students who came to the United States and were placed in higher grades. They do poorly in school.

Each group has very different academic needs, and they are all dependent upon the school system to meet these needs. Hmong children are tremendously dependent on the school system for academic guidance because the parents of these children have had little or no exposure to formal education, and are not literate in any language.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF HMONG STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

Hmong ethnicity creates a number of problems for Hmong students within the academic structure. Inadequate English, spoken and written, is regarded as the primary problem of Hmong students (Goldstein,1985). Added to their lack of previous education, and different learning style, the language problem makes it difficult for Hmong students to complete class assignments. Social studies seems to be a particular problem

(Goldstein,1985). The history taught in textbooks has little to do with the history that the Hmong know so well.

LEARNING STYLE

The learning-style of Hmong children remains primarily "learning by doing" (Kubaw,1977). A textbook used to teach in the Overseas Refugee Training program describes some background factors that might affect learning performance in a western-style school:

> In a rural village, the rhythm of life is organized by the rising and setting of the sun and the planting and harvesting of crops. Everything needed is produced by hand. Young people watch and listen while cloth is woven, fields plowed and tools made. If they learn a second language they do so by working alongside people from other villages. For them there is no need for books. They learn by example...In the case of the Hmong, Mien, Tai Dam and other Hilltribe people, they had lived outside a world of modern technology. (Opening Lines:2)

Cultural distinctions impart different learning skills. Cultural backgrounds may also affect classroom participation. Susan Phillips found on the Warm Springs Indian reservation in Central Oregon that the silence and nonparticipation of Indian children in traditional classroom lessons could be explained "because the social conditions for participation to which they have become accustomed in the Indian community are lacking" (Cazden,et al.,1980:64).]

GROUP IDENTITY

One of the reasons why the Hmong have survived thousands of years of change, from the backside of China [7] to the United States, is because there is a Hmong ethos, an understanding that

they must work together to remain Hmong. Yet, in the American classroom, to work together is often regarded as cheating.

In her study of the learning of Hmong adults in Madison, Wisconsin, Hvitfeldt (1986:70) found that cooperation, non-competitiveness, and group support were "central to the Hmong students' interpretation of student role." Students denied any individual ability even when they were personally praised by the teacher.

> Individual students are continuously in touch with those around them, maintaining interpersonal interaction through verbal and nonverbal checking of each other's books, papers and worksheets. The weaker students look around for assurance; the stronger students maintain a constant check on the work of the weaker students in order to make certain that they are progressing correctly. Help is freely given and even when not requested, accepted as a matter of course. (Hvitfeldt,1986:70)

Hvitfeldt (1986) and Goldstein (1985) both found that Hmong students work better when they are allowed to work as a group. Hmong youth are "socialized to a world view in which the group took precedence over the individual, and personal well-being was dependent on the health of the family or kin group (Goldstein,1985:261). Other students, however, resented the Hmong students being allowed to work together in a math class, for example (Goldstein,1985).

The shyness of Hmong girls has often been cited as a problem for the teacher (Goldstein,1985;Lester,1987). Goldstein (1985) noted, however, that the shyness of the girls prevented them from telling the teacher when something offended their ethnicity.

TENSION BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Cohn (1986:200) found in Portland, Oregon that "Hmong young people straddle two cultures." They are torn between the independence stressed in American classrooms and society, and the Hmong culture that calls on cooperation (Hvitfeldt,1986; Cohn,1986). This tension between their two worlds causes stress.

THE NEED FOR BICULTURAL COUNSELLORS

In light of the increasing tensions between the two worlds, that of the Hmong community and that of the American teenager, the need for bicultural guidance becomes obvious. Hmong youth in Oregon often told Cohn (1986) that they needed counseling in school. Goldstein (1985), found that Hmong students have no-one to direct them or to counsel them. One Hmong girl in high school said, "Nobody can help yourself to decision. You have to help yourself everything" (Goldstein,1985:265). A Hmong Social Worker explained to Goldstein (1985:264) that no Hmong has ever been through the American educational system before. Relying on their group identity and oral tradition, the first generation of immigrants will inform the next generation, but until then, they first Hmong students must create a pool of information from any sources available.

Cohn (1986) and Strouse (1985) found that there was a need for career counseling because the idea of choosing a career is new to the Hmong. There is no future tense in the Hmong language (Strouse,1985; Goldstein,1985), so planning for a hypothetical future is "unHmong." Coming from a traditionally self-sufficient culture, the Hmong are not familiar with the idea of highly specialized fields (Strouse,1985).

PARENTS

Hmong parents regard the education of their children as a "handle on the future," (Moffat and Walker,1985;Strouse,1985), but they themselves have no experience with American education. Goldstein (1985) saw the dilemma of the Hmong parents as wanting to help their children, but not knowing how. Goldstein (1985) found that parents were embarrassed to go to the schools, and had never had personal conferences with any of the teachers. Hmong students identified the need for the education of their parents about the American school system (Cohn,1986).

According to a study in Fresno, California, home of 18,000 Hmong, one of the primary worries of the Hmong community leaders are the intergenerational problems. Refugee Reports (4/17/87) was told by a Hmong man who came in the first wave of Hmong that "the elders have lost hope and the children are adapting so fast. ...Parents see their children lost in a world of entertainment, rather than education, and they don't know what to do." Domestic violence had increased in Fresno as parents tried to assert their traditional authority.

Strouse (1985) found that Hmong parents misunderstood what happens in school. Strouse asked forty Hmong adults in Dane County, Wisconsin "are the schools teaching things you feel are important for your children to know?" The answer was almost unanimously affirmative. The parents thought their children were being taught to speak English and how to get a job. Strouse (1985:132), however, expressed concern over the validity of the response, "it is not clear to me...that the Hmong understand

exactly what the public schools are trying to do."

TEACHERS

Goldstein (1985) is one of the few researchers who has considered the attitudes of the teachers toward the students. Her research, however, never focused on how the teachers were prepared, or how they learned about the Hmong culture and behavior. Echoing teachers around the country, one teacher in Minnesota expressed her delight with Hmong students, "They're a joy to work with compared with other low level students. They're cooperative and intent on learning."

Goldstein (1985:135) found that teachers generally have low expectations for their Hmong students, for example, "I doubt any of the Hmong will manage to graduate from here and go on to

university. They're just not college material." Goldstein found that no Hmong were placed in college bound courses. Teachers were frustrated because almost all of the Hmong were placed in English as a Second Language classes, regardless of age or ability. The teacher has to meet the needs of the advanced and slow students simultaneously.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY

Research this summer at the Ford Foundation showed me that there are only a handful of Southeast Asian teachers in the entire country, and very few are Hmong. In many urban school districts a white classroom teacher relies on Hmong aides. There is very little information on the role of the Hmong aides in the public schools. Goldstein (1985) mentioned that Hmong aides sit at the back of one of the English as a Second Language classrooms in one of the two high schools she observed. They provided help for students whenever it is requested. The term "aides" is loaded with assumptions, but there has been no research to date to find out exactly what role the "aides" play in the classroom.

VII. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The sets of literature I have been discussing all look to variables outside the classroom to explain Hmong children's performance inside the classroom. The first two theories are general analyses of background, and do not deliberately address the specifics of Hmong youngsters in American schools. The first, Kan and Liu, concentrates on socio-economic analysis. The second, the wave theory, concentrates on rural - urban differences among

refugees who fled their first countries at different times. Only the third group of literature attempts to consider the specific cultural milieu out of which Hmong children come. All immigrant children bring into the classroom cultural scripts for roles modeled on the material and social environment of their previous lives. The literature on Hmong ethnicity shows that the norms of Hmong behavior are part of a life vastly different than the life they step into in American communities and American schools. To be successful they must integrate the old scripts with the new scripts.

Kan and Liu (1986) would explain the poor performance of Hmong children by the lack of formal education and professional role models in their family backgrounds. The data suggests that children with educated parents and professional role models have a head start over children with pre-literate parents. Kan and Liu, Rumbaut and Ima, and Caplan, et al, all show that academic achievement correlates with family education levels and the presence of educational resources in the home.

Although Kan and Liu may offer the best theory for why Vietnamese students do better academically than the Hmong, they do not, for example, explain why the Hmong in the San Diego study (Rumbaut and Ima,1987) were more successful in math and grade point averages than the Cambodians or ethnic Lao. The Cambodians and ethnic Lao are not as poor, their parents have had more education, and they have more role models of succesful individuals. A review of the backgrounds and cultural influences on learning of the Cambodians and Lao would be necessary for a

complete explanation.

Perlmann's theory that certain class advantages are carried over from the country of origin to the country of resettlement, referred to in part III, (p.13), challenges the Kan and Liu theory. Perlmann's theory was based on turn of the century immigrants to Providence, Rhode Island, but it fits the case of today's Asian refugees and immigrants as well. Those of today's Asian immigrants who had high levels of education, or who had professional positions in their native land probably have children who study hard and do well academically to help their family return to its previous class status. Does the poor immigrant or refugee see the same opportunity to improve her or his lot?

The wave theory is not an alternative causal theory to Kan and Liu, or to Perlmann, but casts light on an important difference between the situation of the Hmong and that of other Asian immigrant groups. Very few Hmong came from urban or literate backgrounds; almost all were part of the third wave. While there has been much data collected on the "Amazing Asians," there is little besides the Rumbaut and Ima (1987) study that included refugees from rural backgrounds and non-literate traditions. We can safely assume that the lack of familiarity with formal education or written language handicaps Hmong students, based on the work of Niyekawa (1986) and others. We also know that there are some individuals in all ethnic groups who excel beyond the average.

The wave theory is open to criticism on one important level. Suppose all the children from all three waves began school here at

the same time and at the kindergarten level. Is it not inherently plausible that they would all do equally well? No study of Southeast Asian refugees has been conducted that looks at mere access to American education from the earliest grades as an independent variable. It is now possible to conduct a study of children who began school in kindergarten or first grade, regardless of the wave that brought their parents. Kan and Liu argue that there is a "waiting period" before immigrants rise above poverty level, but they offer no similar argument for academic success.

The best of the three explanations of why the Hmong are prone to do less well than Vietnamese students in school lies in the theory that being Hmong supercedes all other concerns. Because of their tribal identity, they are not open to the same level of intellectual commerce with the world at large as other Asian immigrant groups. Hmong youngsters bring their cultural identity into the classroom in a way that no other literate Asian culture does. If educators understood this, they could begin to address specific Hmong vulnerabilities inside the school.

As long as the survival of the Hmong is the highest priority of the Hmong culture - and there is no evidence in any of the literature that this priority is changing - the implications for schools are severe. If Hmong are to succeed in school, teachers, administrators and counsellors need to know who the Hmong are, and have some real understanding of the Hmong culture. Without this awareness they will not be able to provide equal access to the school curriculum.

school curriculum.

The Hmong oral tradition and history as a language minority group seem to give the Hmong advantages for learning to speak another language by training their auditory memories. It seems logical that if the learning style of the Hmong relies on hearing and listening, teachers ought to use these auditory strengths to teach reading and writing. Two ways to link the Hmong strengths to reading are drama and organized class interaction with native English speakers. An ESL class at Boulder High School in Colorado generates much interaction for new English speakers through Worldwinds, a Foxfire type magazine. The students have to interview representatives of their cultures and backgrounds and produce the magazine.

Hmong ethnicity gives a high priority to boys attending school because they believe it is important to the survival of the Hmong. Education is the critical variable in the changing role of Hmong girls and women. Determined to remain in school, but having been raised to be a mother and wife, the successful Hmong girl may, in fact, be the mother of three who graduated from Boulder High School while also holding a job.

We know that Hmong ethnicity is so strong a predictor of fertility that Rumbaut and Weeks (1986) do not expect education or the technological American lifestyle to reduce the high level of Hmong fertility in the near future. With Hmong girls continuing to have children soon after puberty, the high rate of Hmong fertility will continue to affect drop-out rates unless there are sufficient teen parenting programs provided that enable Hmong

girls to remain in junior high and high school while pregnant and to bring their children to school with them.

Torn by two cultures, we do not know which way Hmong youngsters will turn. Because the group identity of the Hmong culture is directly opposed to the independence stressed in the American school cultures, it would seem that the faster they assimilate, the less Hmong they will be. Either there will be no more Hmong in fifty years, as predicted by the grandfather of the Shaman at Ban Vinai Refugee camp, or the flexibility of this ancient culture will allow the young to lead the Hmong (Geddes,1976) into another era as Hmong - Americans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Research to date on the success of the Asian immigrant students leaves much to be explored, particularly in reference to refugee groups other than the Vietnamese. While many questions arise from the background characteristics of the Hmong students about the schools, the literature and research on these institutional issues are sparse. There has been some research that points to, but not a lot that explains, the special problems of Hmong students. There is a gap in the literature and available research on how teachers, administrators, and counsellors are prepared for the changing demographics in their classrooms. There is nothing available on how the schools prepared themselves for the large Southeast Asian student populations, particularly Hmong, populations in Merced, California, and Providence, Rhode Island, Fresno, California or the Twin Cities of St.Paul and Minneapolis.

Only cursory research has been made available on the perspectives of the teachers and the lessons they have learned from their new students. There is no literature on the materials available and the curriculum developed for students, particularly of high school age, who have had little or no previous education. There is also a tremendous gap in the literature on how the Hmong community is involved in the schools, as parents, teachers, counsellors, and aides. More work has to be done on the high drop-out rate of Hmong girls, particularly in identifying those who leave before enrolling in high school, and the linkage between pregnancy and leaving school.

1. Susan Roberts, The Columbia Flier, December,19, 1985. Related articles include: John Dillin, "Asian-Americans: The Soaring Minority," The Christian Science Monitor, October,1985; Fox Butterfield, "Why Asians are Going to the Head of the Class," The New York Times - Education Life, August 3, 1986; "The Triumph of Asian-Americans," The New Republic, July 15-21, 1985; and David Brand, "The New Whiz Kids Why Asian Americans are doing so well, and what it costs them," Time Magazine, August 31, 1987.

2. Although ethnic groups may be referred to by their ethnicity, Vietnamese, Hispanic, white, black, Korean, the author fully recognizes that these are all Americans, old and new.

3. The exception worth noting is the high percentages of Filipino and Asian Indians born here who live below poverty level.

4. The fourth wave is bringing fewer Cambodians since the Thai government has formerly closed the processing camps in Thailand, and not allowed the United States to accept Cambodians from the border camps for family reunification.

5. One of the Hmong oral tales tells of the land of ice and snow "behind the back of China" where days and night each lasted six months and "the trees were rare and very small, and the people were clothed in furs (Mottin,1980, from Savina,1930).

TABLE 1: PARENTAL BACKGROUND OF INDOCHINESE STUDENTS

	HMONG	KHMER	LAO	SINO-VIET	VIET	PRE-78 WAVE	78-83 WAVE
ADULT MEDIAN YRS EDUCATION:	1.6	5.0	4.9	6.7	9.8	9.5	6.3
% CANNOT SPEAK ANY ENGLISH:	34%	55%	47%	55%	25%	14%	43%
% WRITING ILLITERACY:	71%	34%	27%	18%	1%	8%	24%
% URBAN ORIGINS:	8%	47%	79%	95%	94%	89%	72%
% LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL:	94%	81%	82%	78%	57%	34%	80%

All percentages rounded-off to nearest 10th.

Source:
Rumbaut, Ruben and John Weeks, "Fertility and Adaption: Indochinese Refugees in the United States," International Migration Review, Vol.XX, No.2, 1986. Research conducted in San Diego County, 1983 and 1984, on pre-'78 and '78-'83 refugees. Recommended by Linda Gordon of the O.R.R. as representative of total U.S. population of Southeast Asian refugees.

TABLE 2: ASIAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS

	VIET	JAPAN	CHINE	FILIP	KOREA	BLACK	WHITE
ADULT MEDIAN YRS EDUC:	12.4	12.9	13.4	14.1	13	12.2	12.6
% COLLEGE 1-3 YRS:	20.7	20.0	14.6	18.9	15.8		
% COLLEGE 4+ YRS:	12.5	26.3	37.0	36.9	33.9	8.6	17.5
% HS GRAD MEN AGE							
(25-29)	76%	96%	90%	89%	94%	74%	87%
(45-54)	64%	88%	69%	80%	90%	43%	69%
% HS GRAD WOMEN AGE							
(25-29)	63%	96%	87%	85%	79%	78%	87%
(45-54)	41%	83%	58%	71%	69%	46%	70%
% WOMEN CANNOT SPEAK ANY ENGLISH:	34%	27%	49%	32%	51%		

All percentages rounded-off to nearest 10th.

Sources:

U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1980 Census of Population, vol.1., Characteristics of the Population. ch.C.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984, in Xenos, Peter, Robert Gardner, Herbert Barringer, and Michael Levin, "Asian Americans: Growth and Change in the 1970s," in Pacific Bridges The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands, ed. by James T. Fawcett and Benjamin V. Carino. Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies, 1987.

Kan, Stephen and William Liu. In Issues in Asian and Pacific American Education. Minn: Asian/Pacific American Learning Resource Center, 1986. Data from the 1980 Census Public Use Microdata Samples.

TABLE 3: ASIAN AMERICANS

	VIET	JAPAN	CHINE	FILIP	KOREA	INDIAN	BLACK	WHITE
% LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL:	35	4	11	6	13	*	26	7
% FAMILIES OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN (6-17) BELOW POVERTY LEVEL:	43.4	4.2	15.7	6.2	12	10	35.6	10
% FAMILIES OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN BELOW POVERTY LEVEL BY PARENTS YR. OF IMMIGRATION:								
BORN U.S:	*	2.7	5.7	11	3.6	21.6	*	*
BEFORE '65:	*	9.6	7.2	5.2	4.5	5.0		
1965-75:	30.3	6.2	11.3	3.9	8.0	4.8		
1975-80:	43.9	9.4	38.8	11.6	19.5	23.2		
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE: **	3.4	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.8	5.8	2.4	1.7

All percentages rounded-off to nearest 10th.
* data not available
** TFR = 5 x (Sum of Children Born in Previous Year to Women of different age groups, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49)

Sources: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1980 Census of Population, vol.1., Characteristics of the Population. ch.C.;

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984, in Xenos, Peter, Robert Gardner, Herbert Barringer, and Michael Levin, "Asian Americans: Growth and Change in the 1970s," in Pacific Bridges The New Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands, ed. by James Fawcett and Benjamin Carino. Staten Island:Center for Migration Studies,1987; Rumbaut, Ruben and John Weeks, "Fertility and Adaption: Indochinese Refugees in the United States,", International Migration Review, Vol.XX, No.2, 1986.

Kan, Stephen and William Liu. In Issues in Asian and Pacific American Education. Minn: Asian/Pacific American Learning Resource Center, 1986. Data from the 1980 Census Public Use Microdata Samples.

TABLE 4: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES

	HMONG	KHMER	LAO	SINO-VIET	VIET	BLACK	WHITE	sources
MEDIAN AGE:	12.7	17.7	18.9	*	20.8		31.9	ORR/86,
%IMMIG-RANTS <20 YRS:	**51%	43%	46%	*	43%			Haney/87
CHILD-WOMAN RATIOS: ***	1,769	816	553	511	574			Rumbaut, Weeks/86
CUMULATIVE FERTILITY: ****	8.63	5.5	5.25	5.29	4.63			Rumbaut, Weeks/86
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE: *****	11.9	7.4	6.55	4.6	3.4	2.4	1.7	Rumbaut, Weeks/86

All percentages rounded-off to nearest 10th.
* Information not available for these specific groups.
** The data does not distinguish between Hmong and ethnic Lao since they are both from Laos. The majority of Hmong came in 1979 and 1980. The average of immigrants from Laos less than 20 years old was 51% in FY80 and FY81. After FY81, the percentage less than 20 years old declined rapidly. There were few Hmong resettling in the U.S. 1983-1985. Given the high fertility rate of Hmong, it is reasonable to assume that 51% is a plausible percentage of Hmong less than 20 years old.

*** CWR = (Total Children 0 -4 years)/(Total Women of Childbearing Age, 15-44) x 1,000

**** Cumulative Fertility is number of children ever born to women age 45-49.

*****TFR = 5 x (Sum of Children Born in Previous Year to Women of different age groups, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49)

Sources: Haney, Walt. Statistical Report on Immigrant Students for the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1987; ORR: Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1986 Report, Wash., D.C.; Rumbaut, Ruben and John Weeks. "Fertility and Adaption: Indochinese Refugees in the United States," International Migration Review, Vol.XX, No.2, 1986.

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